

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 7, 2021

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse (absent), and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), and Merry Shernock.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. FY 2021/2022 Town Budget Recap & Review.** Manager Schulz said a new Summary of Changes" had been prepared by Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and distributed to the Select Board members that reflects revisions accepted by the Select Board members at their last budget meeting (01/05/21) as well as suggested topics for discussion tonight. At this last meeting, it was Select Board consensus not to budget for a new vehicle for the Northfield Police Department in FY 2021/2022. Left undecided was what to do with the \$45,000 originally budgeted for this purpose. There were suggestions to simply remove this amount from the proposed budget, thus lowering the tax rate, or to shift some or all of these funds to another account. Manager Schulz and Ms. Baroffio were tasked with providing a recommendation for tonight's meeting. It is their proposal to use \$10,080 of these funds to retire an old debt (RSMS FY 2013/2014 Borrowing) in the next fiscal year. This would correspond with the stated Select Board goal of reducing the level of municipal debt over the next couple of years. In addition, \$20,000 would be added to the Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for bridge rehab/replacement. Manager Schulz suggests putting this amount into the dedicated account for the Stony Brook Road Bridge, which probably will require replacement in the next few years. The remaining \$17,500 would be removed from the budget in order to lower the tax rate. As a result of these revisions, the estimated tax rate increase in FY 2021/2022 would be lowered to 2.8%. This is in keeping with the Select Board goal stated early in the budget process that any tax increase be limited to three percent (3%) or less

Chair Maxwell then opened these proposed changes for discussion. Board member Miller agrees with the revisions, particularly adding funds towards the replacement of the Stony Brook Road Bridge. He stated at a previous meeting that the bridge is in very poor condition and he also felt Northfield should not rely too heavily on the expectation of imminent state assistance to resolve this problem. Board member Goodrich agreed that fixing this bridge was a priority.

Chair Maxwell said he had suggested at the previous budget meeting that some of the \$45,000 be shifted to cover some of the future debt payments related to the Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project. However, after a discussion with Ms. Baroffio this afternoon, he is satisfied with current plans to finance this debt. He also supports shifting some monies towards Stony Brook Road Bridge replacement. Board member Stevens also accepts the recommendations from Manager Schulz and Ms. Baroffio.

Chair Maxwell said now that all remaining issues have been resolved, it appears the proposed municipal budget for FY 2021/2022 will not cut major services, will continue healthy investment in infrastructure, and will hold the increase in property taxes to a reasonable figure. He noted that should this budget be approved by voters, a resident with a home valued at \$100,000 would see an estimated property tax increase of \$29.10. Chair Maxwell said he dislikes seeing any tax increase but he felt the Select Board members and municipal management made every effort to keep it to a fairly reasonable amount. Board member Goodrich wanted to clarify that this only covers the municipal part of the local property tax. It doesn't include the Education Tax. Chair Maxwell agreed that this only covers the budget items over which the Select Board has control.

Chair Maxwell then asked Manager Schulz what should be the next step in the budget process. Manager Schulz said now that the budget has been agreed upon, a finalized version will be prepared that the Select Board members can formally approve at their regular meeting of Tuesday, January 26, 2021. This is the same meeting when the Select Board members will approve the 2021 Town Meeting Warning.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 6:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 12, 2021.